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Letter dated 5 March 2015 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter from the representative of the Syrian Coalition dated 5 March 2015 (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Peter **Wilson**

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Annex to the letter dated 5 March 2015 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with great alarm that I draw your attention to the Assad regime's ongoing use of toxic chemical weapons in civilian-occupied areas of Aleppo and its recent expulsion of United Nations aid workers from Syrian territory, in direct violation of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

Over the course of the past month, Syrian regime forces have launched deadly chemical weapons attacks on the cities of Hayan and Haraytan, both located in Aleppo governorate. On Saturday, 21 February, the Syrian civil defence team in Aleppo Province reported the release of a noxious gas following a Syrian regime barrel bomb attack that left a coloured residue. The attack resulted in three casualties who exhibited symptoms consistent with hydrogen cyanide or chlorine attacks. Two days later, on 23 February, the Syrian civil defence team reported similar chemical agent attacks in Haraytan.

The toxic gas attacks in Aleppo were among the latest in more than 1,450 indiscriminate aerial attacks launched by Syrian regime forces since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014) in February 2014. According to satellite imagery analysed by Human Rights Watch, more than two thirds of these attacks were deployed by Syrian regime forces in towns and villages across Aleppo.

The regime's horrific chemical attacks in Aleppo are an end towards a larger goal: to besiege Syria's second-largest city. On 17 February, Syrian regime forces backed by Hizbullah fighters and paramilitary auxiliaries of the National Defence Force launched a violent offensive to occupy the towns of Handarat and Malaah, just north of Aleppo. The offensive was intended to cut off opposition supply routes into Aleppo and ultimately besiege the city, as Syrian regime forces have already done in eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk, where a total of 185,500 people are currently being starved into submission by Syrian regime forces.

Assad's brutal starvation of Syrian civilians has been facilitated by his expulsion of United Nations humanitarian aid workers. On 9 February, Syria's Foreign Affairs Ministry declared an essential field officer working in Homs for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs persona non grata. On Wednesday, 25 February, the Ministry expelled another field officer who was working for the Office in Aleppo governorate. A third United Nations representative, working for the United Nations Children's Fund, was also expelled by regime forces. According to a spokesperson for the Office, those individuals were doing essential work with opposition parties on the ground to secure access for the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian supplies and their expulsion will have a major impact on vital aid operations in Syria, especially in terms of the Office's ability to carry out local-level negotiations for the safe passage and delivery of aid.

Whether in Aleppo, Homs or elsewhere, the actions and atrocities undertaken by Assad's forces cost Syrian lives. They also violate international humanitarian and international human rights law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and

Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), which explicitly prohibit the indiscriminate use of weapons, including barrel bombs, against civilians and impose legally binding consequences in the case of chemical weapons use.

The Security Council can stop these atrocities. It is time that it did so. As members of the Security Council meet for consultations with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to discuss the seventeenth monthly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), my colleagues and I therefore ask that you:

- **Mandate an independent investigation** into the Hayan and Haraytan chemical weapons attacks. Those investigating should be charged with verifying the circumstances of the February 2015 atrocities and be empowered to determine the party responsible for ordering those illegal aerial attacks.
- **Condemn the Syrian regime's expulsion of United Nations aid workers** and make clear to the Syrian dictatorship that its efforts to expel United Nations authorities will not pass without consequence.
- **Enforce existing Security Council resolutions** by imposing sanctions on Syrian regime forces for their repeated and systematic use of toxic chemical agents as illegal weapons of war, as required by Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), and by scaling up aid to Syrians in need, particularly those trapped behind the borders with Turkey and Jordan, as required by Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).
- **Adopt a new, strong and enforceable resolution** that deters the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs.

The chemical weapons and barrel bomb attacks on Aleppo by Syrian regime forces have been calculated to render the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria hopeless. They are designed to impede the peace process and make the realization of a political transition, as required by the internationally endorsed Geneva communiqué, impossible. While the Assad regime claims to comply with the plans introduced by the Special Envoy, its actions tell otherwise. On behalf of the people of Syria, I therefore ask that you take concrete action to make clear that Assad's atrocities will not go unanswered and that members of the Security Council remain firmly united behind the Geneva communiqué.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations
National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces